AIR WAR COLLEGE

AIR UNIVERSITY

LEADERSHIP AND POWER:

ARE WE ADEQUATELY EDUCATING ABOUT THESE TOPICS IN AIR FORCE PME?

by

Matthew J. Butler, Lieutenant Colonel, USAF

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Advisor: James G. Erbach, Colonel, USA

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Biography

Lieutenant Colonel Matthew (Matt) Butler is currently assigned as a student of Air War College Academic Year 2016. He was commissioned in 1996 through Air Force Reserve Officer Training Corps and has served in various operational and staff assignments in Southwest Asia, and the continental United States. He has deployed to Southwest Asia in support of Operations NORTHERN WATCH, SOUTHERN WATCH, IRAQI FREEDOM and ENDURING FREEDOM. Colonel Butler has served as a deputy group commander, commanded at the detachment and squadron level, served on the Air Combat Command Staff, as well as integrated with the Army at every echelon from battalion to corps. He is a Master Air Battle Manager with more than 3,000 hours in command and control aircraft.



Abstract

No military officer can escape the fact that he or she is a leader. With this charge comes the great responsibility of power. Failure to understand the psychology of this power and use it judiciously deteriorates the trust in the leader/follower relationship. Degraded trust can have lasting impacts on this relationship which can cut deeply enough to negatively impact the mission. It is with this basic premise in mind that this paper provides a brief review of the Air Force's use of their professional military education system to educate its officers on these topics. It is not deigned to be a definitive answer to the topic, but rather a document which spurs thought and discussion in the professional military education community to improve the process. This paper will introduce the idea that while the professional military education programs currently in place attempt to cover the concepts, in some cases the education could be improved. The general principles associated with the importance of educating the officer on leadership and the psychology of power are tied to the early-1960s Milgram Experiment and early-1970s Stanford Prion Experiment. Foundationally, the concepts of leadership and power and how they relate to the military will be addressed, with a focus on the Air Force. Once the general themes are outlined, the paper will briefly discuss how officers are educated on these topics. The paper closes with recommendations to improve existing programs and a recommendation to capitalize on the Air Force's new eSchool education concept.

"You don't lead by hitting people over the head—that's assault, not leadership." 1

—President Dwight David Eisenhower

INTRODUCTION

Leadership and the power associated with being a leader are two inescapable aspects of life in the officer corps. These concepts are often used to preserve and better the United States military and its members, but at times members of the military abuse the power entrusted to them. What happens when power is abused and leaders do not conduct themselves accordingly? The outcomes are typically negative at the unit level and can prove disastrous on the battlefield. The balance between the ideas of leadership and power require a daily balance of knowing and understanding the mission at hand and the psychology of power as it relates to leadership.

The Air Force's (AF) current officer professional military education (PME) system does not adequately provide its officers with a mechanism to critically examine the relationship between the psychology of power and leadership. A review of current PME programs reveals a reliance on attempts to weave these themes into the field grade officer (FGO) programs rather than directly addressing them with lessons. With every new incident of military officer misconduct, especially at the senior levels, it has become evident some officers are showing poor judgement in the use of the power afforded to them as leaders. The influence of the leader, both good and bad, has significant impact on organizations and resources. These negative actions not only influence personnel, but often impact mission accomplishment both in a combat zone and from the perspective of a force provider whose responsibility it is to organize, train and equip forces.

The ideas tied to leadership and its associated power are important because as all officers are taught early on in their respective commissioning sources, leading people in order to execute the mission is at the center of what an officer does. Sound leadership becomes even more important as the military moves toward the concept of Mission Command (MC) to fight in today's challenging and complex environment.²

MC is designed to empower people at all levels to use their judgement in order to meet mission requirements.³ It emphasizes trust, force of will, intuitive judgement and creativity.⁴ For the officer, the concept of trust must be established with superiors and subordinates early in the relationship. Trust is established when leaders put their own self-interests aside, and those around them see the leader shares their values and beliefs.⁵ For the AF, these shared values and beliefs are published in such documents as *America's Air Force*, *A Profession of Arms*.⁶ With the emphasis on trust that drives MC, strong positive leadership as well as the idea of the judicious use of power are tied directly to mission execution. Eroding the foundation of trust through negative uses of power at any leadership level, but primarily in the officer corps, is ultimately detrimental to the AF's mission in the realm of morale, discipline and readiness.

PREVIOUS PSYCHOLOGY OF POWER STUDIES

To have a clear understanding of the effects one person can have on a group, it is important to have a basic idea of the psychology of power and authority. The Milgram Experiment (ME) demonstrates just that. The ME was conducted in the early 1960s by Dr. Stanley Milgram at Yale University as a focused obedience research project. The experiment was to determine to what level "normal" people were willing to administer an increasing painful series of authority directed "punishments" to subjects. The subjects in this experiment were 40

males, between 20 and 50 years old with various social and economic backgrounds. ⁹ The premise of the experiment was that three individuals were involved in each session- one teacher (experiment's test subject), one learner (had full knowledge of experiment's goal) and one experimental "authority." The idea was to have the teacher and learner in separate rooms connected by voice communications. The teacher and learner were to work together on word association questions. If the learner answered a question incorrectly or did not answer the test question, the teacher was to provide a "punishment" in the form of an electric shock from a shock generator. 10 Each incorrect answer or unanswered question resulted in an increasingly more severe shock to the learner as "punishment." The shock generator for this experiment was a device which was created to "deliver" a shock that ranged from 15 to 450 volts in increments of 15 volts. 11 In reality, the only voltage put out by this machine was one, 45 volt charge used to demonstrate the generator's capability to the teacher prior to the experiment. ¹² As the "punishments" continued to increase for the learner during the experiment, the learner made increasingly theatrical pain statements and in some cases did not respond to verbal dialogue with the teacher. 13

Based on these reactions or lack of reaction from the learner, often those in the teacher role were unwilling or hesitant to continue with the "punishments." When this happened, the experimental "authority" charged with completing the experiment used four different verbal statements to convince the teacher to go on with the experiment. It is important to note, there was never coercive power used during the experiment to force the subjects to continue. Ultimately, these requests to move on with the experiment resulted in all 40 of the experimental "teachers" delivering 285 volts of punishment with 26 of the 40 members (65%) completing the full test cycle and delivering 450 volts. If

The outcome of the experiment showed some interesting details associated with human nature as well as the power from a perceived authority figure. Based on the researchers' observations during the experiment, most of the subjects knew delivering the shocks was wrong. The findings of the overall experiment detailed the "strength of obedient tendencies" and a willingness of people to follow the requests of authority that have no real power (in the form of coercion) to enforce desires. The research detailed that when a person accepts the authority and their legitimacy, the person in charge has the right to drive behavior. These findings essentially mean the presence or perceived presence of an authority figure can result in people taking actions they know to be wrong or are inconsistent with normal behavior.

Additionally, the results of this experiment are not limited to a one on one leader/follower relationship. These results carry over into organizational structures with one leader and many followers- for example a military unit. These

Additional research into the psychology of power as it relates to the leader role was conducted by Dr. Phillip Zimbardo. The original concept for his experiment was to study the psychology of prison life and the changes a person experiences in accepting his role as either a prisoner or guard.²² The early-1970s Stanford Prison Experiment's (SPE) findings have a direct tie into the military as the themes found during the research reappeared in 2003 in the Abu Ghraib Prison events.²³ The basic results of this research put forth ideas that military leaders should to be cognizant of as they execute their duties.

The core of the SPE research focused around the interactions of 24 male college students randomly assigned to either perform the roles of prisoner or guard in a mock jail constructed in the basement of the Stanford University Psychology Building.²⁴ The original experiment design was to conduct the research over the course of 14 consecutive days.²⁵ All 24 students had passed

initial psychological exams, were of the relatively same social/economic background and had no prior major contact with the criminal justice system.²⁶

The experiment began with a mock arrest and transfer to the "prison" on the morning of Day 1 with prisoners being dressed in issued uniforms and provided behavior instructions.²⁷ Prison guards and the warden (a student) were dressed commensurate with their roles, which included the guards carrying clubs.²⁸ One of the early notes identified in the research was how quickly the guards began abusing their power. The general behavior of the "guards" towards the "prisoners" continued to degrade rapidly during this experiment.²⁹ The final result of this behavior degradation, abusive power of the guards and the mental wellbeing of the prisoners required the experiment be ended early.³⁰ Therefore, within 6 days of the 2 week experiment beginning, Dr. Zimbardo terminated its continuation.³¹

His overall finding was that in powerful social settings, human nature can be changed in dramatic ways; identified as the "transformation of character." This is the idea that best describes why "good" people act in negative ways as situational forces or external sources of stress act on them. Overarching lessons included how much the situation can impact actions of people involved in a circumstance as well as insights into the power of rules and the power of roles.

Although comparing life in prison to life in the military may seem inappropriate, both lifestyles are regimented by rules and roles that make the application of SPE findings relevant to study by the military officer. Also applicable to today's military is the idea that, in both the ME and SPE, the experimental subjects were essentially average American citizens who were rapidly influenced by their respective situations. The ME participants were not outwardly vindictive individuals, and the SPE participants were essentially normal college students. Despite the fact

that both experiments only used male participants, the test subjects, nevertheless, resembled a cross section of society, much in the same manner Air Force Airmen do today.

AIR FORCE LEADERSHIP DOCTRINE

An important aspect of understanding military leadership is to determine how the AF views this aspect of being an officer. As defined by AF Doctrine Volume 2, "Leadership is the art and science of motivating, influencing and directing Airmen to understand and accomplish the Air Force mission in joint warfare." Coupled with this, the AF recognizes that leadership is not synonymous with command and leadership is the responsibility of every Airman. Stated another way, every Airman is expected to exercise leadership; it is not simply associated with a position or a rank. This idea strengthens the argument that ensuring the AF educates officers on leadership and the associated power remains a critical component of PME, as it is not just commanders who are leaders within organizations.

The concept of leader development is outlined in AF Doctrine in an effort to prepare leaders to accomplish future warfighting tasks by applying a "direct, deliberate development philosophy" to their education.³⁷ This philosophy is a key to force development for leaders at the tactical, operational and strategic level through the repetitive process of education, training and experience, coupled with mentoring.³⁸ It illustrates how the AF views education as a key mechanism for enforcing critical ideas and practices by which an officer develops and refines his or her leadership.

As Figure 1 from AF Doctrine depicts, at all three leadership levels a leader transitions during a career, there are substantial changes in the organizational and personal institutional competencies. The one competency that remains relatively static across the three levels is

associated with relationships and leadership. AF success depends on integrating human capabilities such as leadership with airpower centric "tactics, techniques and procedures" to employ.³⁹ If the AF discounts the education of leadership and its tie to power, then there is an opportunity lost by the very institutions specifically designed to foster officer growth across the leadership levels.

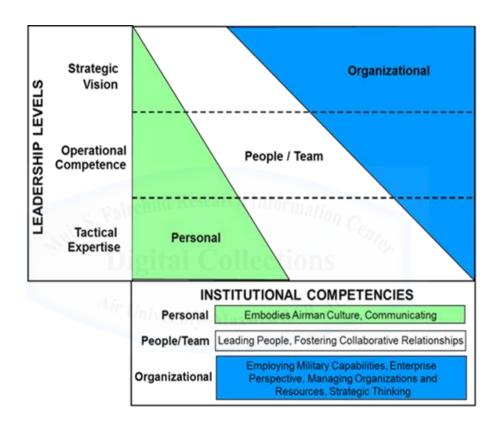


Figure 1- Leadership Level 40

POWER CONCEPTS

Leadership is relatively easy to define in accordance with AF Doctrine; however defining the concept of power associated with leadership is slightly more challenging. With this knowledge it is important to develop a basic frame of reference to be used within this paper for the idea of power. Power, as defined by Moisés Naím, "is the ability to direct or prevent the

current or future actions of other groups and individuals."⁴¹ This definition best describes the power associated with the military leader's role in an organization.

Role power operates within a domain and in most cases this type of power does not work outside the domain. 42 This is true with the role of power as it relates to the military. In the military, role power is seen in two forms-position based and rank based. 43 This is the very concept that allows the officer to influence and command a unit from the minute he or she takes the unit's colors. Role power is grounded in the idea that in order for an organization to exist and perform to maximum capacity, every member must have a role with corresponding expectations. 44 Essentially there is a leader and there are followers. As Terry Bacon notes in his book, this form of power is one of the strongest sources of power a leader can obtain.⁴⁵ With this theory stated, role power is the power source most often abused and can create issues within an organization. 46 Professional studies highlight the fact people do not embrace role power, but are willing to accept it in their organizations.⁴⁷ If a leader exercises this power too forcefully, over time, there is an increased likelihood of resistance which can take the form of open or passive resistance or both. 48 This resistance can slowly build over time or manifest all at once. In the last few years there have been several high profile cases of military officers abusing their power or their respective positions. For every officer power abuse case that makes national news, there are others that do not rise to the level of national interest. Even though these events do not make headlines, the resistance they generate is no less disruptive to an organization and the mission.

In understanding power and the associated psychology it holds, a study of power bases is important as well as how these bases appear in a military environment. There are five types of power bases: 1) coercive power, 2) reward power, 3) legitimate power, 4) expert power and 5) referent power.⁴⁹ Coercive power is based on penalties, the ability to punish through "force,"

either physical or non-physical.⁵⁰ These are often seen as putting another's salary in jeopardy, the ability to suspend someone from work or the threat of bringing bodily harm to someone. Rarely do we see the legitimate threat of physical force used in the military leader/follower relationship. In the military, coercive force can take the form of the power of the pen. By this, the power a leader can wield by simply making reference to an individual's performance report can have an impact on actions. This is becoming truer today as the AF's Enlisted Performance Report System is being overhauled and restructured with substantial changes to performance ratings being enacted. Reward power is driven by the ability of a leader to give something of value to a subordinate.⁵¹ In the military, this can span a very large spectrum from tangible items such as passes and awards to intangibles such as verbal praise and recognition. Legitimate power is tied to a position rather than a person.⁵² This type of power is what the military is most in tune with as it is the one the chain of command is structured around and dovetails into the previously discussed role power. Conversely, expert power is not associated with an office but rather knowledge based.⁵³ In a military environment this is often seen in the trainer/trainee relationship or student/instructor relationship. In many career fields, it is not uncommon to find an enlisted member providing instruction to an officer in a training situation or a more junior military member teaching an academic course to various ranks. Referent power is based on the role model concept.⁵⁴ This power base is grounded in the idea of the professional admiration someone has for another person.⁵⁵ This can be seen in the power of mentorship the military favors as a way to help leaders grow. No leader can rely simply on one power base all the time as situations and circumstances are ever changing in the leader/follower relationship. Leaders typically use more than one power base to accomplish the mission and often have to assess the advantages and disadvantages of each base as well as their timing of use.⁵⁶

AIR FORCE PROFESSIONAL MILITARY EDUCATION

As highlighted in the ME and SPE sample groups, the participants that responded negatively to the phycology of power and leadership were not people predisposed to act in a negative manner. They were responding to either a perceived authority figure or a situation. Going forward with these ideas in today's AF, it is clear how the influence of one person or a small group of people can change the leadership dynamics of an organization. If these dynamics are negative they can erode the foundation of trust leadership and AF organizations are grounded in. As previously outlined in this paper, the cornerstone of accomplishing the AF's mission through MC is trust, up and down the chain of command. The linkage between degraded trust through the improper use or abuse of power by a leader and diminished mission capability is direct. The AF's mechanism to reach its officers and educate leaders on these issues is PME.

Squadron Officer College (SOC) is the officers' first PME experience and occurs as a Captain. SOC is a multi-week residence course which brings together all AF Specialty Codes for the education experience. SOC's largest educational focus is on leadership and leadership development.⁵⁷ The AF's current goal, as outlined in AF Instruction 36-2301, is for all regular AF Captains, with a few exceptions, to attend this program in residence.⁵⁸ According to Major Noonan, SOC Program Manager, the goal of SOC has been to scrap infectiveness in this evolving PME program and create a Deliberate Development Lesson.⁵⁹

Major Noonan spoke of the school's desire to assist the company grade officer (CGO) in developing critical thinking skills to be taken forward as their respective careers progress. In order to do this, the school uses various educational techniques which are grounded in the Full Range Leadership Model.⁶⁰ In line with this model, SOC uses critical thinking exercises (Project

X), ethics lessons and fosters introspective discussions with the officers.⁶¹ The idea behind instructional techniques such as Project X is for officers to learn to lead in an uncertain environment. Tying this with the introspective discussions the officers are required to complete, the Captains develop an understanding of themselves, how they think and how they make decisions.⁶² This reflection begins the process for the CGO to understand who they are as a leader, their leadership style and how they react in uncertain situations.⁶³

In February 2015, SOC added a new aspect to its program with the introduction of a three lesson Ethics Suite.^{64 & 65} This suite outlines for the students their role as officers and requires them to think about how they influence people.⁶⁶ The program uses lessons on personal ethics and organizational ethics to develop academic discussions. These lessons use ideas found in the ME and SPE as teaching points and links the research findings with recent military events such as the Abu Ghraib Prison scandal to educate officers on their roles and the influence they wield.⁶⁷

One aspect of SOC that is different from Air Command and Staff College and Air War College is the course's linkage to working with and gaining a better understanding of senior enlisted Airmen and the followership dynamic. The officer PME program of SOC is tied closely to the AF's Senior Noncommissioned Officer Academy. Senior Boundation resources together is important because it starts to build the foundational trust and respect relationships between the officer corps and the noncommissioned officer corps that are vital in leading military organizations. This interaction permits open and honest discussion on leadership and followership. One of the training devices used to enhance these relationships and foster the mutual understanding between these professional leaders is the use of a Combined Operations Day.

Air Command and Staff College (ACSC) and Air War College (AWC) are considered Joint Professional Military Education I and II schools respectively, therefore course material and content is directed by the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff. The mechanism for this direction is the Officer Professional Military Education Policy (OPMEP). The most current version of this guidance is a 124 page document, dated 29 May 2015, which establishes "the policies, procedures, objectives and responsibilities for officer professional military education (OPME) and joint professional military education (JPME)." One of the main concepts set forth in this document is the call for professional military education at the senior officer level to establish desired leader attributes within graduates of the programs covered under OPMEP guidance. How the direction set forth in the OPMEP is developed into PME lessons within ACSC and AWC is based on the judgement of the schools' respective course directors. AWC is based on the judgement of the schools' respective course directors.

ACSC Leadership Academics is undergoing a transition in March 2016.⁷⁵ A comparison of current (2015) and future (2016) syllabi highlights a shift from an academic program focused on the concepts and ideas of being a commander to a program that will focus on how humans think, organizations behave and developing trust.⁷⁶ Currently, the concepts of followership and the psychology of power do not appear specifically addressed in the syllabus. The new syllabus removes the graded events of developing a Commander's Call Brief, an extemporaneous speaking exercise as well as academic events focused on the role of the First Sergeant and investigative tools available for the commander.⁷⁷ The draft 2016 syllabus calls for these events to be replaced with a self-awareness leadership paper, studies on how organizations develop trust and lessons on ethics and ethical dilemmas.⁷⁸

Additionally, as part of the updated syllabus, ACSC does have plans to address aspects of the phycology of power and its relationship to leadership. According to Lieutenant Colonel Duane Gunn, PhD, there are plans to incorporate Dr. Ben Tepper, a professor at The Ohio State University's Fisher College of Business, into the curriculum as a guest speaker. ⁷⁹ Dr. Tepper has studied abusive leadership relationships and their impacts in numerous environments including health care and manufacturing. ⁸⁰ A review of Dr. Tepper's ideas discussed in the 28 September 2015 issue of *Sports Illustrated* appear worthy of study in today's PME. ⁸¹

For Academic Year 2016, the AWC Joint Strategic Leader (JSL) Course Welcome Letter outlines three overall desired learning objectives as well as the six DLAs each student is expected to leave the course having discussed and thought about. Read of note, at least two of these DLAs specifically focus on trust, empowerment, MC and ethical decision making based on shared values of the Profession of Arms. This is important because it demonstrates a recognized need to hone the officer's leadership skills in today's military. With all AWC's focus on the leadership skills required at the strategic level there are no formal instructional periods (IPs) dedicated to role of the follower in the leader/follower relationship or the psychology of power. These aspects of leadership are covered indirectly throughout the course, much like in ACSC, but are not specifically discussed as an academic requirement.

It is important to highlight that for the above outlined ACSC and AWC courses, the data researched only applies to the residence programs. Unlike SOC where the AF's goal is to maximize in-residence attendance, ACSC and AWC residence programs are designed for the top 15-20% of the officer corps above the rank of Captain. This requires the AF to have a distance learning (DL) program to provide education for the remaining 80-85% of its officers. This was accomplished through the DL programs run by the respective PME institutions. On 1 October 2015, the AF's eSchool was established as a mechanism designed to replace the three separate DL programs. This program is slated to achieve initial operating capability in October 2016

and full operational capability in October 2017.⁸⁸ With the standup of the eSchool, DL programs will begin to retrograde. Therefore this paper will look ahead to eSchool programs rather than focus on legacy DL lessons.

The concept for the eSchool is to provide an officer with a continuum of education throughout their respective careers. ⁸⁹ Initial data on the new courseware shows one of the four core disciplines will focus on Leadership, Ethics and the Profession of Arms. ⁹⁰ Course developers currently have plans to offer an elective within the new school's structure titled Power, Status, and Leadership. ⁹¹ It is currently unknown if this course will make it into the program's final curriculum. ⁹² If this course does make it into the eSchool Program and is only offered as an elective, the education provided by its material will only be imparted on those that register for the course and potentially miss a significant portion of the officer corps.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

Although a relatively new program, SOC's educational program is the most advanced program that examines the concepts as developed by Dr. Milgram and Dr. Zimbardo as well as covers the topic of followership. Understanding these ideas allows the CGO to be cognizant of how they are developing as leaders and how they may respond in uncertain situations. The concept behind the SOC program is for the majority of the AF's CGOs to attend in residence. Theoretically, close to 100% of the Air Force's Captains will be exposed to the education and be critically thinking about their roles as leaders and the psychology of the power they hold. Recommend SOC continue to refine their program using feedback from students and instructors.

In spring 2016, ACSC's Leadership Program will move from a pre-command course focus to a course structured around bolstering the critical thinking skills required for leader

development. Initial information provided by the school appears to show the program is moving in a direction that addresses the above mentioned topics. Recommend ACSC continue to study their program after the new courseware is implemented and refine the program as needed. If guest speakers, such as Dr. Tepper, deliver worthwhile information, I recommend not limiting the audience to one school, but incorporate these lectures into as many PME courses as possible.

When leaders at the military's most senior levels make a misstep in their leadership or abuse their power, it typically becomes national news material for weeks. To see this, one does not have to look any further than 2003 AWC graduate Major General James N. Post III's January 2015 assertion that individual Airmen discussing the A-10 with Congress was tantamount to treason. 93 A statement that resulted in General Post being relieved of his duties as Air Combat Command's Vice Commander. 94 With this incident in mind, it is ironic that AWC does not directly cover the psychology of power or the role of the follower in the JSL Course as the themes are generally woven in the material. The risk with this is the potential for the woven message to be diluted in delivery or missed by the student. It is continually reinforced in AWC that graduates of the school will step into the international arena and assume roles where they will either be senior level commanders or division leaders of staffs. In these roles their words, actions and ideas will have significant influence on those junior to them in a way that is not similar to their previous leadership experiences. Additionally, the leadership positions occupied by AWC graduates will likely be the first organizational check against a leader abusing his/her power or position. Dedicating time to an in-depth examination of the concepts associated with the psychology of power and refreshing JSL Course themes would be beneficial; especially in the final few weeks of AWC (elective period 3) as newly minted strategic leaders are preparing to assume complex roles on the world stage.

The new eSchool will be replacing the current DL programs in less than 2 years. This education program will have the greatest impact on the officer corps as the majority of the officers above Captain will complete their PME through this program. I recommend the course currently being considered as an elective, Power, Status, and Leadership, be added to the core material for mandatory study during an officer's career. The material should be offered either through a distributed/online seminar program or a short-term residence program. This method would improve the educational experience versus simply having an officer self-study the concepts and formulate thoughts in an academic vacuum. Using an educational method where officers cannot only read material, but also engage their peers and course facilitators/instructors in academic discussion will foster officers' critical thinking about the psychology of power and leadership.

Understanding the concepts of leadership and the psychology of power are the cornerstones to the idea of trust development. It is with trust as a cornerstone the AF is able to construct a force that allows for mission accomplishment through the application of MC. In order for these cornerstones to be unshakeable, a strong foundation upon which they are placed must be developed in officer PME. Currently, the AF officer PME system does not adequately embrace the idea of teaching the psychology of power as it relates to leadership and followership across its FGO courses. The concepts outlined in this paper are not rank specific which means reinforcing education at multiple points during an officer's career is in line with AF Doctrine and benefits Airmen which ultimately improves the AF's mission.

ENDNOTES

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- ⁷⁹ Lt Col Gunn, email, 25 January 2016.
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- ⁸⁵ Kamena, interview.
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- ⁸⁷ Dr. Donna Neal (eSchool), in discussion with the author, 20 January 2016.
- ⁸⁸ Dr. Donna Neal, eSchool, Maxwell AFB, AL, to the author, email 21 January 2016.
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